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Mokias, Alexandros J.

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# Comparative approach of educational policy of Greece to intercultural education with other European countries

Alexandros J. Mokias

International Hellenic University

**Abstract:** *Today, due to the cultural diversity of societies, the development of an educational policy that will meet the needs of all students is at the forefront. Intercultural theory is based on equality, justice, recognition of diversity and social cohesion. The existence of immigrants terminates the period of homogeneity. Acceptance of this new reality plays an important role in the education provided to society (Govaris, 2001). Intercultural Education is the response of the educational system in Greece to the changes that take place within the socio-cultural context. Multiculturalism is an enriching factor for society and the educational system and forms the preconditions for a mutual interaction between different cultural traditions. In most European countries, Intercultural Education is the subject of Inclusive Education, and teaching in informal learning environments, outside the traditional classroom, is considered part of inclusive philosophy, where diversity is projected as a learning source (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).*

**Keywords:** education policy, education, intercultural education, multiculturalism, inclusive education

**JEL Classification:** I20, I29

**Biographical note:** Alexandros Mokias is an MSc holder in the management of educational units. . Corresponding author: Alexandros Mokias (mok-al\_@hotmail.com)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the current age, because of the cultural diversity of societies, the development of an educational policy that will meet the needs of all students is at the forefront. Countries are called upon to formulate and adopt policies aimed at accomplishing all the goals of intercultural education. Intercultural theory is based on equality, justice, recognition of diversity and social cohesion. The existence of immigrants terminates the period of homogeneity. In accepting this new reality, education that is provided to society plays an important role. However, in parallel with society, the composition of school units, whose diversity and multicultural character are constantly increasing, is shaped accordingly. It is therefore necessary for the educational system based on new data to support immigrant pupils academically and to accept the diversity and variety of modern society (Govaris, 2001). At this point, it is worthwhile mentioning that the educational system in order to be acknowledged as a successful institution must promote the respect for the diversity of all students. (Aggelidis &

Hadjisotouriou, 2013) This paper aims at the complete focus and explanation of the comparative view of Greece's educational policy on intercultural education with other European countries.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### The educational policy for intercultural education in Greece

Intercultural Education is the response of the educational system in Greece to the changes that take place within the socio-cultural context. It includes a pedagogical approach to managing the multicultural character of society as it has evolved into a shape influenced by historical, social and economic conditions (Gotovos, 2002). Multiculturalism is an enriching factor for society and the educational system and forms the preconditions for a mutual interaction between different cultural traditions. Consequently, intercultural education is linked to the process of meeting cultures and their mutual interaction. It stems from the need for each

society to manage the flexibility, traditions, values systems and symbols within a social context.

Missions around intercultural education issues are influenced by the conditions prevailing at that time and the space-time context in which they are formulated. Greece tends to slowly conform with and follow the developments in the various policies of intercultural education and there have been observed reduced benefits compared to other European countries. Therefore, it is advisable, through the comparative approach, to adopt diversity management policies that have already been successfully implemented in other countries. In fact, intercultural pedagogy raises the demand for recognition and equal presence of a range of different forms of cultural capital in the field of education. (Maniatis P., 2012)

In the age of globalization, many students from different cultural backgrounds come to Greece annually. The bet that Greece has to face is to be able to adapt to the new conditions that are created daily. The immediate goal is to turn multicultural society into a democratic intercultural one with principles such as equality and respect being at the forefront. Thus, all citizens of the country, indigenous or not, are called upon to fully embrace these principles and adhere to them in their everyday lives.

Interculturalism as a concept has emerged in our country in the 1980s, and in 1990 it emerged as an educational policy. Indeed, at that time, the arrival of various immigrant populations from the Balkans, the countries of the former Soviet Union, Asia and Africa took place. Law 2413 of 1996 on the level of education policy of intercultural education allows recognition of the multiculturalism of Greek society and the parallel establishment of intercultural education in the educational curriculum.

The law concerns the creation and operation of schools of primary and secondary education that will be able to offer education to children with different specifications. From 1997 to 2004, various actions were undertaken in Greece aimed at improving the performance of children of minorities threatened with marginalization and educational inequality and their smoothest integration into the Greek educational system.

Thus, the Institute for Education of Expatriate and Intercultural Education was established, which dealt with various issues of intercultural education and submitted recommendations to the Ministry of Education. As regards education policy on intercultural education, it is usually formed under the responsibility of the state and not the school unit. A common phenomenon in Greece was the refusal of schools to register foreign children on the grounds that the schools are full and given the current crisis there is the fear that this practice will reappear (Lagoudakos M.)

In recent years there has been an effort to educate teachers on issues related to intercultural action. Besides, the teacher in the intercultural school is obliged to have a culture-centric competence and to have knowledge of counseling to help foreign students (Lecca, Quervalu, Nunez, & Gonzales, 1998). School leaders and, more generally, school leadership have a duty to encourage teachers to engage in inclusive culture and to engage them in intercultural education with empirical strategies and proper guidance (Leko & Brownell, 2009).

A teacher's abilities are based on: understanding multiculturalism and its implications, understanding concepts such as ethnicity, diversity and minority groups, and learning the skills of counseling through which the values of multiculturalism will be reflected. Each teacher should make it easier for pupils with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to adapt to their new cultural environment while at the same time sensitizing students of the dominant culture to the acceptance of their different classmates in order to harmonize their coexistence. Moreover, the multicultural professional development of the teacher is a necessary ongoing process designed to meet the needs of the local community.

But as Greece is the country that laid the foundations of democracy in Europe, the main concern is the strengthening of values such as equality, justice and solidarity, as this guarantees human rights and gives the various cultural groups the privilege of retaining important elements of their culture and participating actively in the common national culture. This is also the basic pursuit of the educational policy of the countries of the European Union, in order to reduce discrimination and poverty, so that all of them actively contribute to social activities. (Lagoudakos M.)

In conclusion, the Greek education system at the level of general objectives should be geared towards cultivating a comprehensive intercultural identity of students that will allow them to co-exist in harmony with others based on recognition and acceptance. This means that developing a critical intercultural approach requires a shift from an ethnocentric educational approach to an approach that allows viewing issues from many different cultural perspectives. (Maniatis P., 2012)

### **The educational policy for intercultural education in Europe**

In order for the educational systems of European countries to address the multiculturalism of their societies they have brought to the fore the concept of intercultural education. The former major colonial powers of Europe - Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands - with the migration of the workforce that reached its climax in 1970, were filled with a multitude of different ethnic, color and language populations. Along with the expansive policies of the countries in question, their educational policies concerning the education of migrant children, the teaching of the language of the state as a foreign language and the status of teaching mother tongue were also to be regulated. When one compares the educational policies implemented in Europe, they observe differences in the approach of the same subject, based on how the concept of the nation is interpreted, as well as the legislative, administrative and political differences, from the countries of Western Europe such as France and Switzerland. Thus, we find at the center of the pedagogical debate the various pedagogical programs and practices that talk about equal opportunities, social and school integration, the lack of knowledge of the official language of the state and anti-racist education. Starting in the 1980s, two approaches to the issue of immigrant education were made distinctive: 1. The sociological approach, which deals with social inclusion through the provision of equal opportunities. 2. A cultural approach, which considers that an intercultural understanding

must be realized in order to achieve the main objective of education.

Over the last 35 years the concept of intercultural education has crystallized, at the level of pedagogical theories, based on pedagogical practices and programs. Intercultural education is based on intercultural pedagogy, which in turn is based on a wider understanding of "culture". (Lyons & Branston, 2006; Bojan, C, 2009)

The process of promoting intercultural learning was accelerated in the 1990s with the European Council and coincided with recognizing its importance not only in Western European countries but also in other parts of Europe such as the southern countries or the countries of Central and Eastern Europe where cultural diversity issues have become very important since the fall of communist regimes. Today teachers in Europe are facing challenges for which they have not been adequately prepared in their training on intercultural issues and are doing so because they are in continuous training. The main objectives of European education policy are: a) life-related knowledge and skills in an intercultural society and awareness of each culture may differ; b) the prevention of prejudices and stereotypes and the acceptance of different views; c) respect for the cultural diversity and cultural identity of each other and d) the promotion of action against discrimination and intolerance. (Christou & Sigala, 2001; Valachis et al., 2001; Herlo, D, 2015)

In conclusion and based on all of the above, European societies have become increasingly diverse as a result of legal and illegal immigration and teachers face the challenge of how to manage the presence of immigrant pupils. Consequently, the main weight of recent educational policies and guidelines at European level was thrown on promoting intercultural education characterized by social cohesion through the integration of immigrants. In most European countries Intercultural Education is the subject of Inclusive Education and teaching in informal learning environments, outside the traditional classroom, where diversity is projected as a learning source (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

### **Greece's educational policy relations with other European countries on intercultural education**

In Europe, each member country is responsible for defining and adopting the educational policy that will follow. There are many examples of intercultural education. Greece has the potential to integrate many intercultural education management tactics from European Union countries (Sweden, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, etc.), as long as they integrate them together in its national educational policy. However, due to reduced benefits compared to other European countries, Greece is slower in the development of different intercultural education policies. Thus, through the comparative approach, it is called upon to adopt policies successfully implemented in other countries.

Initially, the respect for the needs and particularities of the foreign pupil by both the teacher and his classmates will play a dominant role in teaching. To put it simply, the teacher should not discriminate and his own goal will be to try to lead each student to progress and success regardless of color, gender, or ethnicity. Scandinavian Peninsula countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland) are considered to be innovative in the implementation of good intercultural

education projects. Based on the inclusion model, Scandinavian intercultural education is aiming at offering equal opportunities regardless of racial, religious and socio-economic criteria (Yavrimi, Papanis, & Roumelitotou, 2009). Another successful policy of intercultural education that Greece should adopt concerns the simultaneous coexistence of Greek with the mother tongue of migrants. Scandinavian countries are pursuing an agenda that includes the creation of hybrid identities, the recruitment of teachers from minority groups and the creation of cooperation networks within and outside schools (Angelidis & Hatzisotiriou, 2013). In particular, Greece can adopt practices from Sweden, such as bilingual teaching of migrants, promotion of culture and civilization of the country of origin, and recruitment of specialized staff (psychologists and social workers). In the Swedish education system, the concept of multiculturalism has a leading role in the whole curriculum. Each school is potentially intercultural, as long as there is a half native-half immigrant analogy. Thus, in any school where there are foreign learners they can be offered intercultural education privileges, thus enhancing the bilingual education through the curriculum. In Swedish intercultural schools, basic lessons are taught in two languages, in the major language of foreign class students and in Swedish, with the presence of two teachers in order to enhance the child's psychological development and to provide immediate assistance to the creation of a cultural identity. This has a positive effect on its socialization, stimulating its self-confidence and leading it to better performance. So, speaking about the case of Sweden, we are referring to a remarkable case, because the child retains the right to learn his mother tongue and the language of his parents (Palaiologos & Evangelos, 2011).

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### **3 CONCLUSION**

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It is necessary for teachers to develop intercultural skills in countries such as the French and Flemish Community of Belgium, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Norway (Nicolas, 2008). This can be achieved by educating teachers on intercultural education such as teaching Greek as a second language and teaching in multicultural classes to meet the needs of all ethnic groups. An active role in the whole action should also be undertaken by the Ministry of Education by conducting programs that will provide incentives and ideas to both educators and students, making them wish to broaden their intellectual horizons and develop their critical ability. Values such as equality, cooperation, mutual respect prevail, and teachers are required to protect the student population from racist events by creating groups against intimidation and bullying. In the aforementioned countries, the intercultural skills that teachers should have mastered at the end of their studies are specified. More specifically, these are their knowledge and perceptions regarding the situation of pupils with different cultural backgrounds, as well as their ability to manage the crises arising from the relationships between pupils from different cultures. Ultimately, an important measure for the implementation of an intercultural policy is the bilingual rankings existing in Germany and the lending values applied in England. Their aim is not to assimilate immigrant pupils but to be able to learn their mother tongue

alongside German. The curriculum is single and the lessons are taught by 2/3 in the mother tongue of immigrant pupils (in the lower grades) and 1/3 German-speaking (in the upper classes). A major innovation is the Department of Mother Tongue and Cultural Elements (morning and afternoon sections). Similarly, since the 1980s, the United Kingdom has a rich anti-racist agenda on anti-racism education and the concept of racism, oriented towards the culture of the country of origin of immigrants (OECD, 1995). In addition, in order to ensure intercultural education, workshops can be organized to help parents understand the development of their children, to discuss the problems they face in their education and to share their cultural needs with the school. It is widely accepted that collaboration with the school process (teachers, directors, school leaders, pupils, special education teachers, psychologists, parents and the local community) is essential (Angelides, 2010). Moreover, the involvement of local groups created by immigrants can help the progress of immigrant students. School leadership is responsible for contacting local communities and achieving good intercultural policies. (Hidalgo, 2004)

Finally, the Greek educational system could also pursue the cultural exchange between different cultures and not just their coexistence. Through this cultural exchange a common culture is created, full of values and contents that promote mutual respect and understanding.

In conclusion, the entry of foreign pupils into the Greek educational system redefines the role of the school and leads to its reformation by returning to humanitarian bases. Greece has to exemplify and implement intercultural education practices with European standards and through the necessary reforms to adopt policies of inclusion and assimilation. Besides, inclusive education is a process that begins with the change of curricula leaving the space to adapt each teaching to the individual needs of the students (Angelidis, 2011). However, Greece must design its own intercultural policies and not copy them to the letter.

From all this we realize that intercultural philosophy is related to the creation of a familiar school environment in which the appropriate strategies of teaching and dealing with pupils of different nationality will be implemented with the necessary adaptation of the curriculum and school manuals. (Banks, 2001).

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